



Here are the Winners of Launch Academy's Second Demo Day

by **John Gray** on Nov 21, 2012 | **Startups**

Vancouver's pre-accelerator **Launch Academy** provided the stage for 21 entrepreneurs to make their pitch last night. An intriguing mix of the city's technology startups earned a 60-second opportunity to impress a crowd of more than 250 enthusiasts, supporters, and reputedly even and handful of potential check writers.



Winning over an Angel or two was a slightly higher motivation to pitch than coming in third and enjoying an evening noshing down all you can eat tacos with Ray Walia, (Executive Director and Co-founder of Launch Academy).

There was a seriously palpable buzz to the whole evening. News such as the City ranking ninth in the recently announced **Startup Ecosystem Index** was good for a collective pat on the back.

There are other strong indicators that the Vancouver startup community is continuing to grow up: for example, drawing the support and interest from the likes of Microsoft, SAP, Cisco and Apple. Then add in attendees such as managing partners and directors from Canada's top venture capital firms like Rho Ventures, iNovia Capital, and BDC Venture Capital. The evening proved to leaps and bounds ahead of July's demo day.

It is also worth noting that, as the hub for innovation and creative breakthroughs Launch Academy is now housing more than 55 startups in an impressive new Gastown home. With 9,000 square feet of newly renovated office space, Vancouver's largest accelerator - GrowLab - Microsoft's new Windows Apps Lab, and Garibaldi Capital also add a dynamic presence.

While the evening showed off the community spirit, and a collective thirst for networking and beer, it was the chance to pick the top pitch that really got the crowd going. With the top five startups chosen, they each had five minutes to impress the panel of judges: **Kevin Swan**, principal at iNovia Capital; **Leonard Brody**, GrowLab Founder and president of Clarity Digital; **Jon Cartwright**, founder and CEO of Food.ee; **Kimberly Kaplan**, CEO of Offeron; and **Kristina Simmons**, emerging products and concepts manager at Lululemon).

Here are the top five finalists and winners:

- **Nanu Interactive** (First Place): develops applications that add sharing and magic to family activities.
- **myBestHelper** (Second Place): helps families find, book and pay trusted childcare that best meets their needs on demand and on the go.
- **Thinkific** (Third Place): offers online and mobile courses for professionals.
- **Spokal** (Finalist): an inbound marketing platform for micro businesses that allows them to effectively market themselves online to get customers without a developer, SEO or a social media consultant.
- **WealthBar** (Finalist): provides online investment advice and financial services.

The three winners received a cash prize of \$1,500 and a free ticket for **The Cascadia Summit** in Seattle, a joint initiative organized by GrowLab and Launch Academy to connect startup communities across BC, Washington, and Oregon.

Doing well at a pitch competition is good for the founders, good for team confidence, and makes for a feel good story; but ultimately is doesn't validate the business, or serve as a predictor of future success. The best validation for any start-up is earning paying customers.

Leonard Brody delivered what was perhaps the evening's best observation, saying "the Vancouver community needs to learn some serious lessons about distribution" - really think about your customer acquisition costs and strategy.

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John Gray

John jumped into the startup world in early 2009, bringing his experience in business development and sales to companies creating new software products. He was co-founder and CEO of Mentionmapp, a visual analytics company that was acquired by OverInteractive Media in October 2011. Before that, he sold legal software and services (LexisNexis), medical devices (Auto Control Medical) and... [» more](#)



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Jason Billingsley · 3 years ago
100% agree with Leonard. Many of the startups I see in Vancouver have fundamental distribution challenges. The unfortunate aspect - the entrepreneurs dismiss it as something that will figure itself out.

Great vibe last night though. Certainly more momentum than previously seen.
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Kevin Swan → Jason Billingsley · 3 years ago
Agree. Distribution is the new IP.
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campbellmacdonald → Jason Billingsley · 3 years ago
+1 Jason. 90% of my thought is around product and how it will get distributed. It does not just happen.
Great coverage John G.
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mtippett → campbellmacdonald · 3 years ago
Distribution is easy if you have traction. Traction is the new IP.
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Chris Mack → Jason Billingsley · 3 years ago
I think assuming that startups don't have a distribution strategy simply because

... about accounting that startups don't have a distribution strategy, simply because they don't share what could be a competitive advantage in a public setting with 250 others is perhaps unfair.

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Team myBestHelper → Jason Billingsley · 3 years ago

Leonard's comment was a great way to summarise where all of us presenting companies need to focus. And we can all agree that distribution is but the initial huge challenge, after which comes sustainable (repeat users) and profitable .

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Vincent Ng- MCNG Marketing · 3 years ago

Big ups to you John for covering the Vancouver Scene. We owe a lot to our local media guys that keep pushing Vancouver forward with the awesome startups we produce. Great to see MBH and Spokal doing well.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Team myBestHelper → Vincent Ng- MCNG Marketing · 3 years ago

Thank you Vincent and indeed John and TechVibes help extend the reach of awesome events like the Launch Academy DemoDays. Great write up!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Alex Chuang · 3 years ago

Congratulations to all the Launch Academy companies who pitched! Big shout outs to Ray, Mike, the judges, Mack, sponsors, attendees, volunteers and of course, my amazing team who made it happened. #DemoDay

Stay tuned for more awesomeness from Launch Academy

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Team myBestHelper → Alex Chuang · 3 years ago

The competition level was definitely higher for this second edition. And that is key to success - I learned from my stay @RocketSpace that San Fran is such a fertile land for great startups, because of the concentration of 5 Cs - Concepts, Coders, Cash, Customers and Competition!

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